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ABSTRACT

A significant reason for the establishment of the junior college was the desire to limit the achievement of large numbers of college entrants, because there were not enough high level jobs for all who aspired to complete traditional degrees. In the history of the junior college movement, this problem of mass education has been attacked by providing vocational education, which allows large numbers of students access to schooling without disturbing the shape of the social structure. The shift in junior colleges from a transfer to a career emphasis is related to the expansion of higher educational opportunities and increasing college enrollments. The two-track (vocational and academic) educational system in America developed first in the high school and later in the junior college. In the junior college, this tracking is insidious because there is a pronounced class and racial bias in the composition of student populations in vocational programs. The California Master Plan for 1960-1975 illustrates the channeling and tracking of students into programs more suited to occupational imperatives than to the aspirations or abilities of entering students. Evidence indicates the growing regressive power of two-year colleges and that going to a community college thwarts a student's academic chances. The challenge of the 80's is to provide real opportunities for students to realize their potential. (RC)

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SECOND BEST: RESOLVING THE UNFULFILLED PROMISES OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Speech presented to the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (Chicago, Illinois, May 1, 1979)

Speech
The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges
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Second Best: Resolving the Unfulfilled Promises of the Community College

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Before presuming to suggest those challenges that remain for us in the 1980s and even more presumptuously to suggest ways to meet those challenges, it seems to me to be important to look at where we are and how we got here. Thus I ask your indulgence as I sketch in my history of the community college.

Standard treatments of two-year colleges invariably begin with the numbers, because numbers have come to be both the blessing and the curse of public higher education in America. We are blessed, we are told, because so many of us have been able to enroll in colleges and universities; never before in the history of the world has such a large persentage of the population participated in some form of higher education.

But numbers have historically been a curse as well: what to do with so many people seeking forms of education traditionally reserved for a nation's social and intellectual elite? What to do involved the creation of a new institution,

the two year college, to administer the blessing of nearly universal higher education and exorcize the curse of those vast numbers threatening to destroy the intellectual sanctity of the university.

Analysts always seem to begin with numbers perhaps because they are amazed by these figures (as they should be) and also because they feel the need to somehow account for them (as they also should). So I'll begin there as well, less out of amazement than out of the need to account for them and trace their consequences in other than the standard ways. At the beginning of this century, just eight junior colleges existed, all of them "private", enrolling all of 300 students. In 1979, more than 1,200 exist, most of them "public," enrolling more than 4,300,000 students. And though for the first time in twenty years there was a one percent drop in total enrollments last fall, the prospects continue to be good for increases in "community education" programs and for part-time adult students.

Important as it is to point out this remarkable growth, it is equally essential to examine its pattern: from 300 students in 1900 to half a million students in 1950, when the modern community college emerged, to eight times as many in a little more than twenty-five years. This geometric expansion in two-year college enrollment has paralleled a similar growth

in senior college and university enrollment. In 1920, 8 percent of the college-age population (the eighteen to twenty-one year old group) were in an institution of higher education; in 1964, 40 percent; and more recently we have shot past the 50 percent level, with all of this incredible expansion proceeding much more rapidly than the rise in the total population.

The percentage of students beginning their college experience at two-year colleges (a new statistic) has also been increasing at an even more phenomenal rate. In my book, Second Best, I speculated that by the year 2000, 70 percent of all college freshmen would begin their postsecondary education at a community college. In fact, by 1977, 63 percent of first-time students began at a two-year college. Thus, as we have moved from class to mass higher education, the responsibility for dealing with the numbers has largely fallen on the community colleges.

Unfortunately, though, this process has not been all that benign. Contrary to what is claimed by the many community college boosters, as the numbers have increased, so have the pressures to divert more and more students toward what were called "terminal" or career curricula designed to prepare them for dead-end, middle-level jobs in the technologies and service industries.

It is my contention that the desire to limit the achievement of significant percentages of college entrants was inherent in the reasons for establishing junior colleges in the first place. In the past, when only a few went to college, college graduation could assure a high chance of social and economic success. But now with more than half the eligible students attending, the older, uniform system of higher education cannot continue because it would encourage the unfulfillable aspirations of too many people. Now both the leaders and the followers are enrolled, and there just aren's enough high-level jobs for all of them. This explains the geometric expansion of two-year colleges and the emphasis on "cooling" their BA-aspirants into terminal programs which inspire more socially appropriate aspirations and help foster the behavior patterns necessary to these students' actual future work roles.

I will try to show that this has been a process rooted in the history of the junior college movement. It is a saga with precedents in the history of the expansion of high schools--the first institution that tried to grapple with the problems of mass education. It is also a history particularly entwined with the rise of vocational education, the principal educational vehicle for fulfilling promised but unsatisfiable aspirations.

The founding fathers of the two-year college were not concerned with what came to be called junior colleges; quite the contrary, they were concerned about the university--the real university. Most of them had been to Europe, either having studied at or visited the great German universities of the mid-nineteenth century. And what they saw they liked.

When they returned home, they called for the establishment of American versions of the German model. Incidentally related but critical to the Germanization of the American university was the establishment of an American versin of the German gymnasium, or preuniversity preparatory school--the prototype of what was to become our own junior college. For the founding fathers, purging the university of the first two years of "college" work had nothing at all to do with extending higher educational opportunities to a wider public. What they were after was something they called the "pure" university for an intellectual elite interested in the professions or a life of scholarship and research. In order to accomplish this, the universities had to be freed from the burden of having to offer what they considered to be secondary-level instruction. To them, this would take place most appropriately in a reconstituted high school. Only the most able would pass through this proposed American gymnasium into the new university.

In reality, the plan to restructure higher education along German lines got nowhere. Virtually no university eliminated its freshman and sophomore years, though a number tried--notably Stanford and Johns Hopkins. They had to give up the idea, most often because of economic considerations, not academic imperatives. During hard times these schools needed the tuition maoney they collected from their freshmen and sophomore students or, if they were public institutions, the subsidies they received from the state for theses students. Athletics also had a good deal to do with ending the restructuring: how could a school compete in intercollegiate sports without half its quota of eligible students?

Many universities, however, did at least grab half a loaf: though they may not have been able to cut off their lower division they did manage to make admission requirements more stringent. Essential to their becoming more selective was the creation of a new institution, the junior college. William Rainey Harper, perhaps more than anyone else, was responsible for its birth . As president of the University of Chicago, he was able both to subdivide his school into an upper and lower division called the"senior" and "junior college" and to convince the superintendent of the Joliet public school system to allow the high school there to expand its offerings to include the first two years of college-level work. Increasing selectivity and stimulating the diversion of students from four to two year colleges were very much a part of Harper's effort. For example, he got the University of Chicago's junior college division to offer the first associate in arts degree, not so much to reward students for work well done but rather to encourage them to "give up college work at the end of the sophomore year" (my emphasis). He felt that many students who "would have been served by withdrawal from college" continue on rather than face "the disgrace which may attend an unfinished course." If, therefore, you give them some kind of degree, many may give up after two years, leaving only the most gifted to fo on to upper-division or graduate work.

This elitist point of view was also manifest in California, and what happened there became the model for the rest of the country under the leadership of Alexis F. Lange, dean of the School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley, and David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University. For fifteen years prior to the 1907 epoch-making legislation that allowed California high schools to offer "post-graduate courses of study... which... shall approximate the studies prescribed in the first two years of university courses," Berkeley and Stanford -- prodded by Lange and Jordan -- had been trying to reshape themselves by separating their upper from their lower divisions. Their reasoning was the same as that of the "pure university" advocates: the university most appropriately should begin at the junior year level; the work of the first two years is more naturally of a piece with secondary education and should therefore be relegated to the high school.

The first California junior college was established in Fresno in 1910. It was also the first to articulate a vocational education focus for itself. The Fresno Board of Education slipped into the charter the statement that "technical work" should also be included in their junior college's curriculum, although the 1907 California statute explicitly limited the scope of postgraduate high school offerings to university-parallel courses. The law, however, caught up with practice when in 1917 the state legislature passed a new statute allowing junior colleges to offer courses in the mechanical

and technical arts. And thus the junior college entered a new period of growth with a new agenda -- the expansion of its vocational programs.

The American Association of Junior Colleges was founded at about the same time, 1920, and it was to play a major role in advocating this new vocational agenda. But it wasn't always easy to convince the membership. After all, leaders of the junior college movement had expended much energy trying to convince students and the general public that two-year colleges were more than just extensions of high school -- even though in fact that's how they began. Wouldn't stressing vocational education at a time when junior colleges were just gaining public acceptance undermine all this hard work?

Eventually, a number of ideas and events made it inevitable that the A.A.J.C. begin to take an aggressive role in promoting vocational education programs at junior colleges. A key idea was the concept of the "semi-profession." Somehow it seemed appropriate for colleges to be training people for "semi-professions" rather than merely for "occupations" or "vocations." A key event was the Depression. Not only did it result in many students being forced to attend junior colleges who ordinarily would have gone to more expensive four-year colleges, but many who did attend were attracted to the idea of a more practical education.

World War II also proved to be a boost for career education: again, formerly transfer-minded students wanted even more vocational courses, and the A.A.J.C. was there to encourage colleges to make the necessary adjustments in their curricula. It also became more actively involved in helping state legislatures draft appropriate laws that would allow junior colleges to expand their offerings. As early as 1937, the A.A.J.C. decided to press for revision of the federal Vocational Education Acts to allow federal funding for occupational programs in schools "of less than senior college grade" -- the original Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 allowed subsidies only for schools "of less than college grade," thus in effect making junior colleges ineligible for federal vocational money. The A.A.J.C. had more success in the state legislatures than in the halls of Congress, as not until the passage of the 1963 Higher Education Act did two-year colleges receive any federal money for their vocational programs.

But money or not, the programs were well established. The problem was that until recently so few students signed up for them (only perhaps a quarter of the student body). For me, understanding the effort to shift the junior college's focus from a transfer to a career function is critical to the real meaning of the dramatic expansion of higher educational opportunities during this century. As William Crosby Eells noticed more than forty years ago, "The development of the terminal function is an essential corollary of the success of" the expansion or democratization of higher education. But is vocational or, if you prefer, semi-professional training in the junior

college an expression of higher education's fulfilling the promise of upward mobility, as is commonly claimed? Is it just a historical coincidence that precisely at those times when there has been a rush of students seeking admission to college (and before that to the high school, as we will see) there has also been a concurrent movement to create and promote vocational programs for these students? To see how this has worked for the junior colleges, it is necessary to go back a bit in time to trace briefly the development of vocational education in America.

Since so much American educational history exhibits an expansion or extension of programs from lower to higher institutions one would expect, when working back from encountering vocational education at the college level, to find it first in the high schools. Not quite. In fact, vocational education began in the colleges before it got to the secondary schools--in the land-grant colleges in 1862, to be specific, following the passage by Congress of the legendary Morrill Act. The legislation set aside public land in every state to be sold in order to endow and maintain state colleges devoted to the agricultural and mechanical arts for the children of "the industrial classes." They were the first in a serires of "people's colleges." But before too many "people" arrived, they rather quickly came to resemble the aristocratic colleges to which they were supposed to provide an alternative. Very early in the game they actively sought to change both their image and purpose--and quite successfully. As early as the 1870s, merely a decade after their birth, a few stopped calling themselves "agricultural" colleges and rechristened themselves "state college" or "university." As a much longer range indicator of this change in emphasis, by 1955, while enrolling only

20 percent of all students in degree-granting colleges and universities, the land-grant schools awarded 39.3 percent of all the doctoral degrees--nearly all of them in nonagricultural, nonmechanical subjects.

As these colleges backed away from their original commitment, into the vocational education vacuum moved the high school. The early high school was decidedly nonterminal. It was clearly an intermediary step on the educational ladder between elementary school and college. In 1870, for example, eight out of ten high school graduates entered college, and six of them went on to receive degrees. In addition, at that time there were more than twice as many college graduates as there were people with only high school diplomas. Of course relatively few in absolute numbers attended either high school or college, but these percentages dramatically indicate the exclusive college-preparatory function of the early high school.

But as high school enrollments began to increase exponentially, a second, vocational track came to join the traditional academic track. After 1880, census figures show a doubling of both total high school enrollments and graduates for every decade through 1930. During those fifty years, high school enrollments increased from 110,000 to nearly four and a half million students. It was during this boom in high school enrollments that the Smith-Hughes Act was signed into law, the first of all federal legislation. This Act set precedents for all vocational education legislation to follow in at least two respects.

First, it allocated funds, as we have seen, only for high school level programs; and second, it insisted on an impenetrable separation -- within high schools -- between academic and vocational tracks.

There was nothing inevitable about the establishment of this first two-track educational system in America. Another choice might have been the comprehensive high school which was discussed at this time; it was not discovered in the 1950s by Admiral Rickover. John Dewey, for one, argued for such a comprehensive or "unit system" in which academic and vocational subjects would be intermingled; he saw this to be the only democratic method of organization. The dual system won out, however.

Later, when enrollments began to increase in the colleges, when it became apparent that waves of new students were threatening to swamp the colleges and universities as they had already engulfed the high schools, the reaction at the college level was identical to that of the secondary schools--to create a vocational track. But this time a little differently: create a second track within a second institution--the junior college. And again, as with the high school, there were alternatives and choices to be made. There was nothing inevitable about encouraging the expansion of junior colleges or the creation of terminal curricula within them. For example, the idea of the comprehensive four-year college was considered, and models existed for such institutions. As late as 1960, more than 75,000 students were enrolled in subbaccalaureate programs in four-year institutions. In fact, at least 403 four-year colleges and universities offered occupational curricula of a subbaccalaureate nature.

My contention is that the expansion of vocational education, first in the high schools and then in the junior colleges, is more a way of providing large numbers of students with <u>access</u> to schooling without disturbing the shape of the social structure than it is a method for democratizing American education. Stated differently, the emergence of vocational education has been our way of dealing with demands for universal secondary and higher education: as more wanted or forced their way in, we have shunted them to vocational programs. More education, at a time of educational inflation, does not of itself mean more social mobility. What is important is the <u>kind</u> of education one gets, and vocational education has never been that kind.

This tracking within community colleges is even more insidious because there is a pronounced class and racial bias in the composition of the student population that finds its way or is counseled into vocational programs. Compared with students in transfer programs, terminal students are significantly lower in all measures of socioeconomic status -- family income, father's occupation, father's education, and so on. Add to this the fact that black students are considerably more likely than whites to be found in vocational programs and one gets a clear picture of the pattern.

I mentioned earlier that until very recently community colleges have had difficulty convincing students to enroll in vocational

curricula. For example, as recently as 1970, only 27 percent of their students were to be found in career programs. But five years later the percentage had nearly doubled as the result of a faltering economy, the belief that liberal arts graduates were lucky to find jobs even driving taxi cabs, and intensified efforts in the media to inform potential students of all the jobs available at the semi-professional level. However, a new look at the demographics of the career students and the fact that they are considerably less likely to complete their educational goals indicates that a dual track continues to exist within two-year colleges. In addition, the little evidence that is available indicates that career programs are of dubious value in preparing students for the work for which the programs were designed and of even less value in leading to careers that are well paying, open-ended, and fulfilling. For these reasons, vocational programs might be considered the third best aspect of the community colleges.

State master plans for higher education are frequently good places to look at how systems work to channel and track students into educational programs more suited to occupational imperatives than to either the aspirations or the abilities of the entering students. They also often reveal how all of this social manipulation serves social equalibrium rather than, as claimed, social change. The California Master Plan for 1960-1975 is illustrative. The major recommendations relate to how to maintain and even further stratify their tripartite higher educational system. The planners find

disturbing symptoms indicating that if current trends continue, in the late 1970's lower-division enrollments in the state colleges and the university will be increasing faster than enrollments in the junior colleges. Therefore, students have to be "diverted" (their word) to the junior colleges so that this trend can be reversed. The democratic/meritocratic position is that the students will sort themselves out through the system on the basis of a fair competition based on ability and talent. But their proposal to divert fifty thousand students from the state colleges and the university to the junior colleges does not reflect meritocratic ideals; rather it reflects social needs which require fiddling with the numbers in order to fit the higher educational division of labor to the nation's economic division of labor. If the democratic process doesn't produce the required 10 to 20 technicians for each scientist or engineer, then the democratic process has to be adjusted.

The proposed diversion is to take place by making the higher status institutions even more selective and by creating more vocational programs in junior colleges. In this way, it might be said, you get them coming and going. This is how it works in California -- the model system. First, decrease the percentage of high school graduates eligible to enter the upper two tiers of the system: make a third rather than 50 percent eligible for the state colleges and 12 and a half rather than 15 percent eligible for the university. Next, do a better job of "selling" (their word)

the junior colleges, including telling students about how it's easier to park at the two-year institutions. If necessary, set up further admissions quotas. Finally, if all else fails and too many students keep seeping into the elite parts of the system, eligible students will have to be persuaded by "coercion" (their work again) to attend the junior rather than the senior colleges. But divert them in any case, even if it proves to be "difficult and dangerous." An it must be done quickly to avoid "an atmosphere of clamor and controversy."

A fine illustration of both the effectiveness of this diversion and its concomitant regressive social consequences may be found in a brief analysis of how California's system of public higher education distributes the economic benefits of higher education among the taxpayers. In California, as elsewhere, money talks. And what it says is that California's three-tiered system is socioeconomically stratified and regressive in its redistributional effects.

Using data from the mid-1960's, Lee Hansen and Burton Weisbrod document precisely how this works. First, the poorest students are found in California's junior colleges; more affluent students are found in the middle-level state colleges; and the richest are found in the elite university colleges such as Berkeley. Second, the average number of years these students remain in college parallels this overall structure: 1.2 years for junior college students, 2.6 for state college, and 2.8 for university college students. Third, 55 percent of entering university college students finish their BAs, as do 50 percent of state college students, but only 8 percent of junior college students achieve

the bachelor's degree. Fourth, future earning capacity is dramatically improved for persons with four or more years of college and only marginally affected by a year or two of college. And finally, when you calculate the amount of taxes each economic group contributes to support higher education in relation to the monetary benefits they derive in the form of tuition subsidies and increased earning capacity, the "net transfer" is only significant for the group that attends the four year colleges (+ $40 per year for junior college students, +630 per year for state college students, and +790 per year for university college students). Hansen and Weisbrod conclude: "Some low-income persons have benefited handsomely from the availability of publicly subsidized higher education. But on the whole, the effect of these subsidies is to promote greater rather than less inequality among people of various social and economic backgrounds." Even President Connally, who has taken me to task on occasion, provides recent evidence of how this unequal transfer of funds works in New York State to the detriment of community colleges.

If regressive transfer programming at two-year colleges is second best and career programming is third best, than surely programs available to part-time students are fourth best. Until recent years enrollment growth was primarily among so called "traditional" 18 to 21 year old full-time, day session students. As their numbers have leveled off and in some places begun to decline, colleges have made effots to recruit and accomodate

"adult", part-time students. For example, since the early 1970s there are more part-time students attending community colleges than full-timers. And they are increasing in number at a much faster rate. But these students are also failing to complete their educational plans at a much higher rate. Accurate statistics are difficult to come by, but it would appear, for example, that fewer than 5 percent who aspire for baccalaureate degrees ever attain them. Part-time students are taught almost exclusively by part-time faculty; they have virtually no advisement or counseling available to them. They are even lucky to be able to get more than a cup of coffee during the evening.

There is additional evidence of the regressive power of two-year colleges. It appears that just the fact of going to a community college thwarts a students' academic chances. The Folger Commission discovered that when you compare an academically equivalent sample of transfer students who begin college at a two-year college with similar groups who begin as freshmen at a four-year college, the community college BA aspirants are less than half as likely to go on to receive the degree as their senior college counterparts. The Carnegie Commission feels that some of this may be due to low motivation to go on among two-year college students (in spite of their aspirations) or inability to deal with the financial burden of attending even a low-tuition college. Undoubtedly, these are influential factors.

I am convinced, however, that the staggering attrition rate at the community college (Charles Monroe says a two-year college is doing very well if half of its students return for a second year) in itself is one of the community colleges' major unackonwledged functions. Folger and his colleagues again tell us that if all low-socioeconomic-status students whose abilities equal those of the more affluent students who complete baccalaureates were also to complete BAs, American higher education would turn out at least twice as many college graduates than as at present. Then what would we do with them all? Send them on to apply to increasingly selective graduate schools? Send them out to hunt for jobs that don't exist? Ask them to be content with the intrinsic rewards of a liberal education? Actually, none of the above. Because as things currently stand, with community colleges acting as the safety valve for the higher educational system, the vast majority of these students will never get their baccalaureates, and we will never have to provide answers to these questions.

Now, what are and have been the promises of the community college and what are the challenges for the next decade? I want to sketch in a few ideas that we can elaborate, if you wish, during our discussion.

A primary mission involves retaining the concept of open admissions. During the last decade there has been much talk about how to prevent the open door from becoming a revolving door. I suspect that this will continue to be an issue as it may very well be that community colleges will continue to see the sorting out of students to be one of

their major objectives. My problem is when this sorting is rigged against the very people the institution is supposed to be helping. Our challenge then is to provide real opportunities for students to have a fair chance to realize their potential. For me, above all else, this means that two-year colleges and their staffs must take an honest look at their objectives, particularly those that may be hidden and regressive. There must be a total institutional commitment to the success of those students who can succeed. And according to Benjamin Bloom, with proper academic expectations, support systems, and learning environments, this may include up to 80% of those currently enrolled.

Skills programming and counseling are critical to these efforts. To be successful they have to deal with the stigmatizing effects of most unsuccessful programs -- and there are still more of these than most of us would like to admit. Skills must be an adjunct to everything we do (they are, for example, at their highest level, at the heart of Harvard's new undergraduate curriculum). We should avoid creating remedial ghettos. Instruction should be criterion based, individually paced, and set in learning centers rather than classrooms. Counselors should spend as much time heating up or encouraging students as cooling them out of their dreams and aspirations. Being academically realistic should not always involve trying to convince students to abandon medicine for medical technology.

With regard to curricula, the 80s challenge us to be truly comprehensive in our offerings. The noble idea of offering an honest array of transfer and career options has been perverted into a multi-tiered tracking system within two-year colleges more related to social engineering than human aspirations and potential. True comprehensiveness means an emphasis on process as much as upon content -- this serves the needs of meaningful career programs as well as a true liberal arts experience. More specifically, in the career area we should foster the development of those skills required to be vocationally flexible, assertive, and communicative rather than merely adding more and more specializations to our curricula of little demonstrable value. Transfer programs should not deny the importance of preparing students for careers. Here too we should stress the acquisition of portable life skills, emphasizing those that lead to the ability to think and act critically and autonomously.

I began with numbers and perhaps I should end there. A challenge for the 80s involves how we will deal with this decade's swelling number of new students -- adult, part-time students. Up to this point, out interest has often been in their F.T.E. power -- how many dollars can they bring us to replace those we are losing as the pool of traditional

high school graduates contracts. Working adults are fast becoming the majority on many campuses. To serve them meaningfully, we must also commit ourselves to their success. Curricula, the learning environment, modes of instruction, support services should be based upon our growing knowledge of adult development and learning theory. Much of what we know about younger students is applicable to adults; however, much is inappropriate. Faculty and staff development programs are needed to prepare college professionals to work successfully with these new students. It is the least we can do for these good citizens who now pay the double price of sending both their children and themselves to college.

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